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From Risk to Resilience: India's Initiative to Mainstream Disaster Risk Reduction in the G20

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Introduction

India's G20 presidency coincided with the midpoint of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development. The mid-term review of SFDRR shows that while progress has been made on several fronts, at the present rate, the world will not be able to achieve the SFDRR targets by 2030. The progress in reducing disaster risk is outpaced by the rate at which exposure and vulnerability to hazards is increasing. While the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events are increasing due to climate change, disaster risk linked to geophysical hazards such as earthquakes is also escalating, particularly in rapidly growing cities.

Overall, in most parts of the world, disaster risks are increasing at a rate higher than the rate of economic growth. For smaller economies such as the Small Island Developing States (SIDS),

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disaster losses are already eroding a significant proportion of their GDP – sometimes wiping out more than half of their annual GDP in a single event -- making it increasingly difficult for them to achieve sustainable economic growth.

The Indian Presidency of G20 recognised that disaster risk reduction is one of the central development issues of the 21st century. India's efforts are based on the conviction that concerted efforts by G20 members can infuse a sense of urgency to the implementation of SFDRR globally. Dedicated focus on disaster risk reduction is a prerequisite for not only achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but also for successfully implementing other climate-responsive policies, such as implementing the energy transition. It is in this backdrop that India proposed a new Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group (DRRWG) under the Sherpa Track of G20, and forged a consensus on its five key priorities.

Work of the G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group (DRRWG)

The newly constituted DRRWG has identified the following five priorities: a) Universal Coverage of Early Warning Systems; b) Disaster and Climate Resilient Infrastructure; c) National Financing Frameworks for Disaster Risk Reduction; d) Post-Disaster Recovery, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation with a focus on building back better; and e) Nature-Based Solutions and Ecosystem-based Approaches for Disaster Risk Reduction.

These priorities represent a carefully identified subset of SFDRR priorities where G20 can achieve rapid progress and leverage results across all the priorities of SFDRR. Over the last nine months, the DRRWG came together as a cohesive group and worked intensively through three meetings held in Gandhinagar, Mumbai and Chennai in March, May, and July, respectively. The DRRWG deliberations were informed by 12 side events and one site visit to the earthquake

memorial and museum, *Smriti Van* in Bhuj. The Working Group was supported by more than two dozen knowledge partners who provided technical input papers and compendia of good practices.

The DRRWG delivered an Outcome Document and Chair's Summary that identifies concrete actions against each of the five priorities. A three-year roadmap of the DRRWG seeks to sustain momentum during future presidencies by envisaging specific milestones and knowledge partnerships.

Value Addition of the G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group (DRRWG)

The value addition of the DRRWG to the global discourse on Disaster Risk Reduction can be summarized in the following five points:

Putting People at the Centre

In line with the human-centric spirit of India's G20 presidency, DRRWG has tried to put people at the centre, and created a space for deliberation where community voices can inform the global policy discourse. For example, discussions on Early Warning Systems started with hearing the perspectives of community leaders from Odisha, India, and Mount Agung, Indonesia. Similarly, on Post-Disaster Recovery, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, the DRRWG brought in perspectives of community leaders from India, Indonesia and Italy. This has ensured a resolute focus on achieving impact on the ground, by identifying priorities that are aligned with people's needs.

Focus on Financing Disaster Risk Reduction

The need for ex-ante financing of disaster risk reduction has been recognized for more than two decades. Yet, most countries,

international aid agencies, and multilateral development banks allocate far greater amount of resources for ex-post mechanisms. A relatively small proportion of resources is allocated for *reducing* disaster risk. The DRRWG discussed this anomaly in great depth. DRRWG looked at different models for financing disaster risk reduction, including enabling environment for incentivizing private investment.

The Indian presidency also provided an opportunity to take the issues of DRR Financing to the meetings of the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors. The focus has been as much on appropriate financial and institutional architecture as on securing more finance for disaster risk reduction. The DRRWG has taken a comprehensive view on financing whereby the entire spectrum of disaster risk management needs – mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and reconstruction – can be met at the national and sub-national levels.

As a corollary of the above, DRRWG has also focused on increasing investment in resilience of infrastructure sectors. Keeping in mind the Quality Infrastructure Investment Principles of the G20 Infrastructure Working Group, the DRRWG, with support from the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), has explored state-of-the-art risk assessment tools and metrics that can inform investment in resilience and help develop innovative financing strategies and infrastructure risk governance.

Convergence

A unique value proposition of G20 is the opportunity it provides for working across multiple work streams. The DRRWG worked closely with other Working Groups, most notably the Environment, Climate and Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG), the Development Working Group (DWG), and the Infrastructure Working Group (IWG). As a result, disaster risk reduction-related

outcomes were reflected in the Outcome Documents of other Working Groups as well. For example, ECSWG articulated the need for promotion of disaster risk reduction actions to enhance ecosystem resilience, and under the DWG in the G20 High Level Principles on Lifestyle for Sustainable Development, the use of geospatial data, including access to early warning systems, has been accorded priority.

Finding a Common Ground

For far too long, the conversation on disaster risk reduction has been marked by the dichotomy between developed and developing countries. In an interconnected world, where disaster risks are increasingly systemic, cutting across boundaries, these dichotomies do not serve us well in making progress. The DRRWG established that the focus should be on reducing disaster risk wherever it is high, irrespective of the geography and the level of economic development. For this purpose, the best possible technical resources and innovation from across the world should be mobilized. Given the right support system and collaborative frameworks, innovation can emanate from anywhere in the world, including from the Global South.

Building Global Knowledge Partnerships

In a short span of nine months, the DRRWG mobilized more than two dozen knowledge partners, from the south and the north, who provided high level technical inputs -- guidance notes, compendia of good practices, and analytical progress reports -- that provided strategic guidance to the Working Group. DRRWG also coordinated with various global efforts and partnerships working on specific aspects of DRR. These engagements indicate that there are a lot of untapped knowledge resources that can support the

global disaster risk reduction efforts. Partnerships developed over the last nine months will continue to serve the cause of DRRWG during the coming years under the presidencies of Brazil and South Africa.

Way Forward

The 2024 presidency of G20 will be led by Brazil, followed by South Africa in 2025. Brazil and South Africa will play an important role in steering the DRRWG agenda set out by the Indian Presidency. Building on the work done under DRRWG during the Indian Presidency, we can anticipate that significant leaps can be made in four areas during the Brazilian Presidency:

1. The work on universal coverage of early warning systems can enter a new phase with a focus on promoting ***pre-arranged finances*** to take ***early action*** thereby ensuring that Early Warning Systems truly work as ***systems*** that serve the needs of communities at risk.
2. Given that thirteen out of twenty G20 countries are already members of CDRI, **disaster and climate resilient infrastructure** is already a top priority for the DRRWG and has gained significant traction under the Indian presidency. Building on the compendium of good practices started under the Indian presidency, common approaches towards infrastructure design, operations, maintenance, regulatory frameworks, and financing strategies can be developed.
3. The DRRWG has recognized the importance of **Nature-based Solutions and Ecosystem-based Approaches for Disaster Risk Reduction**. In 2024, there can be a greater focus on generating and collating a robust evidence base (including cost-benefit analyses) for the effective implementation of these approaches. This will also include building specific linkages with ongoing work on biodiversity loss, water and food insecurity, and human health.

4. On **gender and social inclusion**, both through side events and technical deliberations, the DRRWG emphasized the need for more investment and cooperation around supporting and scaling up localized, community-led DRR actions, and integrating the perspectives and needs of women, Indigenous Peoples, marginalized communities, and under-represented groups into disaster risk reduction at local, national and international levels. This can be further pursued during the Brazilian presidency in three ways:

First, developing and financing more innovative and cost-effective models of anticipatory action – such as layering it with social protection – to protect the livelihoods and assets of economically vulnerable communities, and preventing disasters from undermining progress toward poverty alleviation. There is significant potential here for leveraging technology-driven models for financial inclusion, as being discussed in Finance Track Working Groups, to enhance the efficiency, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness of such financial transfers to affected and at-risk communities.

Second, the DRRWG could also advance the Indian presidency's call for centering women's leadership and participation within international development cooperation, building on the experiences of India and a number of other Member States who have seen women play a critically important role in both disaster preparedness – such as coordinating community-wide response to early warnings – and resilience, particularly via ecosystem-based DRR approaches.

And third, leveraging technology for more cost-effective collection of sex-disaggregated disaster risk, and damage and loss data, investing in women's leadership, funding resources, and technical capacity at the local level, and regional partnerships – such as the Canada-Caribbean Resilience Facility, that centres gender responsiveness within its programme design

and funding approaches – are all thrust areas for the DRRWG to ensure more inclusive and responsive disaster risk reduction going forward.

In conclusion, the DRRWG is an important legacy of the Indian Presidency of G20. It has set out an ambitious yet achievable agenda for itself. The five priorities identified by the Working Group are very specific, and have the potential to have a transformative effect on disaster risk reduction efforts across the world. If sustained over the coming years, it could be a valuable contribution of G20 towards accelerating the implementation of SFDRR, as called for by the G20 Leaders in the New Delhi Declaration.

“Soon, the G20 will be nearing 25 years of establishment. Such a milestone is a good opportunity to evaluate what objectives the G20 set out with and how far it has been able to achieve them.”

*— Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister of India*